Social Media Optimization Strategy to Strengthen Teacher Professionalism in Islamic Educational Institutions

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Abstract :
This study examines social media optimisation strategies for enhancing the professionalism of teachers in Islamic educational institutions in Gresik Regency. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, document searches, and field findings. The results of this study show that teachers utilise various social media platforms, including WhatsApp for communication and coordination, Facebook for professional community development, and YouTube for creating and disseminating educational content. However, this implementation faces significant challenges, including the risk of spreading negative information, a lack of digital literacy among some teachers, and resistance to technology. To overcome these barriers, educational institutions have implemented proactive strategies that include digital literacy training, content creation workshops, learning community development, periodic evaluations, and collaboration with parents. Therefore, the research provides implications that emphasise the urgency of formulating adaptive policies and providing ongoing, practical support to develop digitally competent and ethically based teaching staff.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology has fundamentally changed various aspects of life, including the global educational landscape (Fedorenko et al., 2023; Rahimi & Oh, 2024; Zhao et al., 2023). This shift can be understood through the lens of social constructivism theory, where knowledge is no longer solely transmitted but is constructed collaboratively through interactions in increasingly complex social networks (Apostolidou, 2022; Levin et al., 2025; Russo et al., 2024). In this context, social media is emerging as a tangible manifestation of these fundamental changes, facilitating unprecedented connectivity and allowing individuals to access, share, and dynamically produce information (Apostolidou, 2022; Levin et al., 2025; Russo et al., 2024). This transformation demands the adaptation of traditional teaching paradigms towards an approach that is more relevant to the needs of the digital generation, which is inherently involved in the digital ecosystem. Teachers are now expected not only to master the teaching materials but also to have qualified digital literacy and the ability to utilise technology effectively (Kerkhoff & Makubuya, 2022; Nguyen & Habók, 2024; Strydom et al., 2021). The potential of social media as a means of informal learning and professional development for educators, although often overlooked, is now beginning to receive serious attention in efforts to improve the quality of education.

Previous studies have extensively explored the role of social media in the development of teacher professionalism and education in general. Research conducted by Rasdiana et al. (2024) found that social media plays a crucial role in enhancing the professionalism of teachers in madrasas, serving as a means of communication, discussion, and interaction. In line with previous research, Selfa-Sastre et al. (2022) and Skrbinjek et al. (2024) demonstrate that the effective use of social media can enhance knowledge, improve pedagogical competence, and foster teachers' creativity. Furthermore, other research also confirms that social media encourages the development of technological skills and teaching innovation. However, the literature also identifies significant challenges (Almufarreh & Arshad, 2023; Timotheou et al., 2023; Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). In response to this complexity, several other studies have also underlined the importance of sustainable strategies through training and *workshops* (Horn et al., 2023; Mebane et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). However, there are still research gaps that explicitly examine the optimization of structured and value-aligned social media for teacher professionalism in Islamic educational institutions, including how these challenges are addressed through contextual strategies.

Although the existing literature has identified the potential and challenges of social media in teacher professionalism, there are still critical gaps related to systematic and value-aligned optimization in the context of Islamic educational institutions. Previous research has tended to provide an overview of technology adoption or teacher professionalism. However, it has rarely qualitatively explored how faith-based institutions specifically navigate the complexities of digital platforms to drive teacher growth holistically, while upholding Islamic ethical principles. The absence of an in-depth exploration of adaptive strategies implemented in the Islamic educational environment to integrate social media ethically and productively is a significant and unresolved research problem.

This study makes a significant contribution to the field through an in-depth qualitative examination of social media optimisation strategies for enhancing the professionalism of teachers in Islamic educational institutions, particularly in Gresik Regency. In contrast to previous research that was often general or technical, this study provides a careful exploration of the interaction between digital tools, professional development, and Islamic values. We explore how these institutions proactively address challenges such as misinformation and digital literacy gaps through tailored programs, community building, and the creation of ethical content, aligning technological advances with spiritual principles. This unique contextualization and focus on *catalytic optimization* provide fresh insights that enrich academic discourse on educational technology and Islamic pedagogy.

This qualitative research aims to comprehensively analyze the implementation of social media as a strategic catalyst in improving the professionalism of teachers in Islamic educational institutions in Gresik Regency. Specifically, this study seeks to: (1) identify patterns of social media use by teachers in their pedagogical practices; (2) outline the main challenges and obstacles faced during this integration; and (3) examine specific optimization strategies implemented by institutional management to strengthen teacher professionalism while adhering to Islamic principles. By achieving these goals, this research is expected to provide a nuanced understanding of the effective integration of social media in faith-based education, offering actionable insights for policy development and practical implementation that nurture adaptive, creative, and ethically grounded educators.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an intensive single-case study design, focusing on the specific context of Islamic educational institutions in Gresik Regency. The selection of this design is based on the need to explore holistically and in-depth the phenomenon of social media use in strengthening the professionalism of teachers in Islamic educational institutions, a complex and contextual aspect. The case study design enables a rich and detailed exploration of the social practices, perceptions, and interactions that shape the social media utilisation strategy in the real-life environment of this educational institution (Charli et al., 2022; Miri & Macke, 2022; Nassaji, 2020). Qualitative research approaches are chosen as an epistemological foundation, in line to understand the subjective meaning and experiences of informants (Bouncken et al., 2021; Leko et al., 2021; Maxwell, 2020). This approach, rooted in the interpretivist tradition, enables researchers to interpret social realities from the participants' perspectives, providing richer and more nuanced insights into the dynamics of social media utilisation that quantitative approaches may overlook.

Data collection in this study was conducted through triangulation methods, including in-depth interviews, document reviews, and field observations. In-depth interviews, as a primary method, aim to explore the perspectives, experiences, and understanding of key informants regarding the use of social media to enhance teacher professionalism, address challenges, and develop optimisation strategies. The researcher acts as a key instrument, interacting empathetically and flexibly with informants to build rapport and facilitate the collection of naturalistic data. The research informants comprise a diverse range of relevant parties, including teachers, principals, students, and education supervisors, each of whom offers a unique perspective on the phenomenon being studied. This research was conducted in Islamic educational institutions in Gresik Regency. To ensure the credibility of the research results, source triangulation techniques (comparing information from various informants) and *member checking* (validating data interpretation with informants) are applied systematically. Departing from this, the Research Informant used in this study is as explained in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Informant

Interview Code	Informant
W1	Teachers, provide insights into teaching and policy implementation in the classroom.
W3	Students, please share your perspectives on learning experiences and interactions with teachers.

Afterwards, the collected qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic approach, following an adapted framework from Miles & Huberman that included data reduction, data presentation, and drawing out conclusions (Bingham, 2023; Briand et al., 2023; Khoa et al., 2023). The analysis process begins with data reduction, where raw data from interviews, documents, and field findings are filtered, summarised, and focused to identify patterns and relevant themes related to the implementation of public relations management. Furthermore, the data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives and tables, which help organise information systematically and make it easier to understand. The final stage involves drawing conclusions, where the meanings derived from the data are interpreted and linked to the research objectives. These measures collectively contribute to increasing the credibility and depth of data interpretation, ensuring that the findings produced are comprehensive and representative of the reality being studied.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

The use of social media as a catalyst for teacher professionalism in Islamic educational institutions is an approach that integrates digital platforms into the educational framework, not only for administrative purposes but also to enrich pedagogy, facilitate collaboration, and enhance teacher capacity on an ongoing basis. This approach goes beyond the use of social media as a mere communication tool. It is a paradigmatic shift that encourages teachers to transform into adaptive, creative, and innovative lifelong learners. This concept emphasizes how teachers can leverage various social media features, such as content sharing, interaction, and collaboration, to broaden their professional horizons, enrich teaching materials, and engage more deeply with the educational community, while still adhering to Islamic ethical and moral values.

Integration of Social Media in Learning Practice

The integration of social media in learning practice is an adaptive step taken by teachers to align teaching methods with existing technological developments. This sub-theme examines how teachers in Islamic educational institutions use various digital platforms as tools to support the teaching and learning process. By integrating social media, teachers not only facilitate wider access to information but also create a dynamic, interactive, and relevant learning environment that reflects students' digital reality. This includes the use of social media as a source of teaching materials, a communication medium, and a means for developing educational content, which ultimately aims to enhance the effectiveness of learning. The use of social media in learning activities is becoming a prevalent practice in these Islamic educational institutions, with an emphasis on the unique functionality of each *platform*. The following informant's statement evidences this:

> "I use WhatsApp to coordinate with other teachers and also with parents. We have a dedicated group to share information about student development, assignments, and school activities. It helped our communication (W2)".
> "We are also active on Facebook, especially in professional community groups. There we can discuss, share experiences, and get inspired by new teaching methods. This helps us to keep learning and adapting (W1)".

The results of the interviews suggest that the use of social media has become a vital component in enhancing the professionalism of teachers in Islamic educational institutions. Educators strategically utilize a variety of digital platforms to facilitate effective communication and collaboration. It is observed that a single dominant platform is utilised for internal coordination among teachers, as well as to facilitate transparent interaction with students' parents, enabling the exchange of information regarding academic progress and school activities. Meanwhile, other platforms serve as a forum for teachers to engage with the professional community. There, they actively discuss, share experiences, and seek inspiration for innovative teaching methods. This reflects the teachers' commitment to continue learning and adapting to the evolving dynamics of contemporary education.

In addition, departing from findings in the field, it is found that the use of digital platforms by educators in this institution has been significantly integrated into the learning and communication ecosystem. Specifically, WhatsApp groups are a crucial medium for disseminating teaching materials, such as PDF files and educational video links, which directly support the teaching and learning process of students. Furthermore, the public relations management strategy of this educational institution is strengthened through the use of the official Facebook page. This platform is consistently used for the publication of various school activities, ranging from religious programs that shape character to the achievements of students' academic accomplishments. These publication activities inherently contribute to building a positive image and increasing public trust in the institution. Not only that, but several educators also optimise the YouTube platform for creating and uploading learning videos. This initiative not only enriches learning resources but also reflects the capabilities and creativity of teachers in constructing content that is relevant to the curriculum's substance, demonstrating the adaptation of teachers' professionalism in the digital era. Building on this, it is evident that the integration of social media in learning is illustrated in Figure 1.
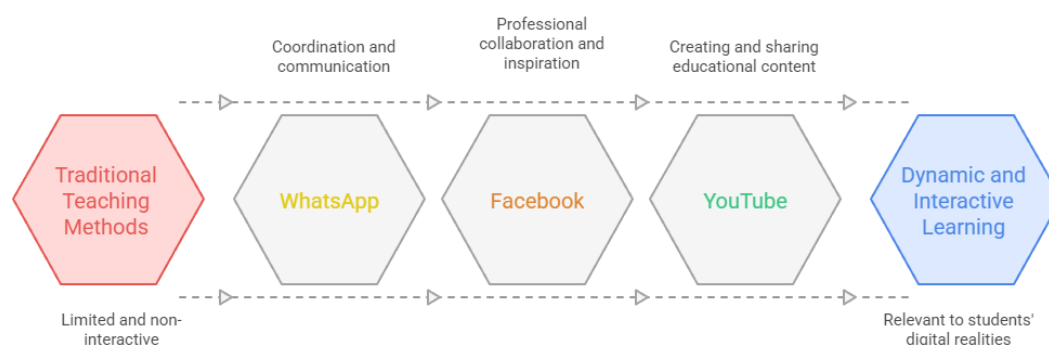

Figure 1. Integration of Social Media in Learning

Building on these findings, it can be concluded that the use of social media by teachers in Islamic educational institutions exhibits a multidimensional pattern. First, platforms such as WhatsApp are predominantly used to facilitate efficient communication and coordination, both between teachers and with students' parents, allowing for a transparent and real-time exchange of information regarding academic activities and student development. Second, Facebook serves as an important platform for teachers to engage in professional communities, facilitate discussions, share experiences, and seek inspiration for new teaching methods, thereby actively supporting the development of ongoing professional growth. Third, there is a pattern of dissemination and creation of educational content, where teachers not only disseminate existing teaching materials but also take the initiative to create new learning content, such as videos on YouTube, thereby enriching learning resources and demonstrating pedagogical creativity. Finally, the institution's official Facebook page demonstrates a strategic approach to public relations management, serving as a platform for showcasing activities and achievements that contribute to the development of a positive image and enhance public trust in the institution.

Challenges and Obstacles to Social Media Use

Despite its great potential, the use of social media in education also faces significant challenges and obstacles. This sub-theme outlines the obstacles faced by teachers and Islamic educational institutions, such as the risk of spreading negative information, low digital literacy, and resistance to technology. Identifying these challenges is crucial for formulating the right strategy to optimise the use of social media. This indicates that technology adoption is not a seamless process, but instead requires a thorough understanding of the risks associated with it and proactive efforts to mitigate them. The risk of spreading negative information is one of the biggest challenges that arise from the use of social media.

The following informant's statement evidences this, "The spread of hoax information and content that is contrary to Islamic religious values on social media is the primary concern. We have to be very careful in selecting and filtering the information shared with students (W1). Additionally, limited digital skills are also a significant obstacle. The following informant's statement evidences this: "Some senior teachers still have difficulty using social media for learning. They are less familiar with technology and more comfortable with conventional methods, which presents a challenge for us to integrate technology evenly (W3).

Based on the results of interviews conducted with several informants, it is evident that there are two fundamental challenges to implementing social media in the Islamic education environment. First, there are deep concerns about the potential for the spread of misinformation, including hoaxes and content that contradicts religious values. This demands extra caution in the process of filtering the information to be accessed or shared with students, underscoring the importance of strong digital literacy. Second, it was identified that there are limitations in digital skills among some educators, especially those who are more senior. A lack of familiarity with technology and a preference for conventional methods are significant obstacles to integrating social media evenly into the learning process. This condition has implications for the lack of variety in teaching methods, which can ultimately limit pedagogical innovation.

Through the exposure of the information presented earlier, several main patterns related to the challenges and obstacles in using social media in the Islamic education environment can be identified. The first pattern is the risk of spreading negative information, where teachers are concerned about the emergence of hoaxes and content that contradicts religious values, thus demanding caution in filtering information. The second pattern is the limitations of digital literacy, which is evident in the difficulty some teachers, especially seniors, face in adopting technology and their preference for conventional methods, which in turn hinders learning innovation. Finally, there is also a pattern of resistance to technology, where some teachers tend to use social media passively or exhibit discomfort with change, which hinders the institution's efforts to integrate technology in an even and innovative manner.

Optimization and Strengthening Professionalism Strategy

To overcome these challenges, Islamic educational institutions implement a series of structured optimization strategies. This sub-theme examines the various proactive steps taken by institutional managers to enhance teacher professionalism through the use of social media. This strategy includes training programs, the development of learning communities, encouragement for the creation of educational content, and continuous evaluation. The goal is not only to overcome obstacles but also to create an educational ecosystem that is collaborative, adaptive, and grounded in Islamic values. Educational institution managers are actively taking the initiative to ensure that teachers have adequate resources for optimizing their use of social media.

The strategies related to optimizing and strengthening professionalism in Islamic Education Institutions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Optimization and Strengthening Professionalism Strategy

Strategy	Implementation	Supporting Evidence
Strategies for Improving Teacher Competence	Training and Content Development	We regularly hold digital literacy training and educational content creation workshops. The goal is that teachers can not only use social media, but also be able to create helpful content, in line with Islamic values (W1)."
Collaboration and Continuous Learning	Formation of Learning Communities	"We encourage teachers to join the learning community, both inside and outside the school. Social media is a tool to facilitate discussions and share best practices on an ongoing basis, so that teachers' professionalism can continue to grow (W3)."
Quality Monitoring and Improvement	Periodic Evaluation and Collaboration with Parents	Findings in the field show that educational institutions are also actively evaluating the use of social media by teachers. This evaluation serves to monitor the effectiveness of the implemented strategies and provide the necessary feedback or follow-up. Additionally, collaboration with parents through WhatsApp groups is also part of this strategy, where teachers and parents work together to supervise student development.

The results of the table above highlight the proactive approach of educational institutions in optimizing the use of social media to improve teacher professionalism. At the heart of the message is a commitment to educator capacity building through a series of structured initiatives. It can be seen that the institution consistently organises training programs that focus on digital literacy and skills related to educational content production. The primary goal is to empower teachers not only to operate social media but also to create relevant material that aligns with educational values. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on the formation and activation of learning communities, both within and outside the school environment. Social media serves as a key facilitator for ongoing discussions and exchange of best practices, which synergistically promotes the development of teacher professionalism.

Discussion

This study reveals that the use of social media has been a significant catalyst in enhancing the professionalism of teachers in Islamic educational institutions, extending beyond basic communication functions. The findings show that teachers functionally integrate various digital platforms, such as WhatsApp for internal coordination and transparent communication with parents, as well as Facebook to engage in professional communities, facilitate discussions, and share best practices. However, this adoption is not without challenges, including the risk of spreading negative information and hoaxes, as well as the digital literacy gap among educators. To overcome these obstacles, educational institutions have implemented comprehensive optimisation strategies, including digital literacy training, *educational* content creation workshops, the formation of learning communities, and periodic evaluations. The field findings further corroborate that this initiative not only improves the technical competence of teachers but also strengthens the institution's public relations management and builds a positive image in the eyes of the public.

Building on the exposure of the findings, this study enriches the existing literature on the role of social media in the development of teacher professionalism, particularly in the context of Islamic educational institutions. The findings regarding the use of WhatsApp for coordination and Facebook for professional communities align with previous studies that have highlighted the efficiency of teachers' communication and collaboration in the digital age (Jailobaev et al., 2021; Nelimarkka et al., 2021; Toker Gokce & Balcı, 2023). However, this study adds nuances by showing how *the platform* is specifically adapted to meet the contextual needs of Islamic education, including content filtering according to religious values. A significant contribution lies in the identification of patterns of resistance and digital literacy gaps that are often underexplored in the general literature on teacher technology adoption. Thus, this study not only supports previous findings regarding the potential of social media but also fills gaps in understanding specific barriers and adaptive strategies required in value-based education environments.

The findings of this study can be analyzed through the lens of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), as researched by Unal & Uzun (2021), with a focus on Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use. The adoption of WhatsApp and Facebook by teachers for coordination and professional development reflects the high Perceived Usefulness, where teachers experience the immediate benefits of social media in making their work easier and improving their competence (Horn et al., 2023; Mebane et al., 2023; Selfa-Sastre et al., 2022). However, challenges such as limited digital literacy and technological resistance point to obstacles to Perceived Ease of Use for some teachers, which in turn affect their attitude toward using and Behavioral Intention to Use. The theoretical contribution of this study is to extend the application of TAM into the context of Islamic education, showing that cultural and ethical factors, such as concern over negative information, also play a crucial role in the perception of usability and convenience, which may not be fully covered in the classical TAM model.

Through this, the results of this research confirm that social media has transformed into a strategic instrument in the Islamic education ecosystem, not just a communication tool. This research is important because it presents a comprehensive understanding of how social media is integrated, the challenges faced, and the proactive strategies implemented to strengthen teacher professionalism in this specific context. The contribution of this study's findings is significant because they enrich the theory of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by adding cultural and ethical dimensions relevant to Islamic education, demonstrating that religious values and concerns about harmful content influence perceptions of usefulness and convenience. In addition, this research makes a practical contribution by presenting recommendations that can be implemented to enhance digital literacy, facilitate collaboration, and foster a positive image of the institution, thereby shifting the perspective on the role of social media as a catalyst for adaptive and innovative teacher professionalism.

CONCLUSION

This research addresses the need to elaborate on the crucial role of social media in enhancing the professionalism of teachers in Islamic educational institutions, within the context of the contemporary digital ecosystem. Our empirical findings confirm that educators strategically integrate diverse digital platforms to facilitate efficient communication, professional collaboration, and educational content creation initiatives.

Nonetheless, this adoption faces significant challenges, such as the risk of spreading negative information and digital literacy gaps. In response, educational institutions proactively implemented comprehensive optimization strategies, including digital literacy training programs, the development of learning communities, and continuous evaluation. The implications of this study underscore the importance of adaptive policy formulation and the provision of ongoing, practical support to develop digitally and ethically competent teachers.

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